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# After Twenty Years

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*Iglesia Evangelica, San Pedro Sula, Honduras*

Twenty years! To the boy or girl of twenty, a period of twenty years seems a very long time. To those who are approaching the biblical span of seventy or eighty years of life, it seems comparatively short. Viewed in the light of eternity or even of the history of the church stretching over almost two thousand years, they represent but a brief episode.

Our church has been at work in the Honduras field of Latin America for twenty years. However long or short this period may appear to us, its progress is worthy of serious consideration and calls forth many interesting observations. It is the desire of the writer to enumerate briefly some of the changes which have taken place in the country and the people of Honduras and in the missionary work of our church during this period.

His first personal contact with Honduras and its people came in 1928. One of the memories of that visit is of the large proportion of men on the trains and on the streets of villages and towns who carried six-shooters at their belts and Mauser rifles in their hands. One could not help but be reminded of the conditions which prevailed on our own frontier in the west fifty or sixty years earlier.

Honduras had just passed through a number of revolutions, and stories were told of government and revolutionary troops fighting in the very outskirts of San Pedro Sula, jeopardizing the lives of our missionaries and of their school children. On one of

these occasions our missionary ladies manufactured an American flag from dress materials in their possession in order to secure, if possible, whatever protection the American flag could give.

Another visit to Honduras was made in November and December, 1941. The progress which had been made in these thirteen years was impressive. There were still men with six-shooters, but they were rather a curiosity and none were noted carrying Mauser rifles except the soldiers of the government.

Honduras now has a stable government and revolutions have become unnecessary and therefore are no longer resorted to. Life and property are much more secure. Honduras and its people seem to have entered upon a period of orderly progress which promises much for the future.

San Pedro Sula recently built a beautiful city hall which can compare with those found in any American city of its size. Many streets have been paved. Several boulevards have been opened with beautiful residences bordering these wide thoroughfares. While the road system of Honduras is still largely undeveloped, beginnings have been made, which, if persisted in, should make communication between cities more rapid and comfortable.

The airplane has been introduced as a means of travel between places unreachable by railroad or highways, and it is possible to travel from San Pedro Sula, our oldest mission station, to Yoro, eighty miles away,



*Our mission school at San Pedro Sula, Honduras—dedicated on  
November 30, 1941*

in forty-five minutes. Fourteen years ago it required three days' hard travel on mule-back to cover this distance.

The missionary work of our church was begun on invitation from Honduras itself. This does not, however, indicate that large numbers of people in Honduras were eagerly waiting for an evangelical type of Christianity. Our missionaries had to go the hard way in Honduras, even as they did in other countries. The Spanish language needed to be studied, contacts had to be made and methods of work carefully studied for their effectiveness in a predominantly Roman Catholic environment.

A number of rather curious situations arose as our missionaries endeavored to develop an evangelical church life. Some of the early converts were inclined to resent the use of the Lord's Prayer, the baptism of infants, or the presence of an altar in the church, because these are Catholic as they said. This prevailing antipathy to the above mentioned Christian symbols and means of worship had to be tactfully, yet strongly, counteracted. Then, too, the Latin American tendency toward individualism made the building of a congregation in an evangelical sense more difficult than in certain other mission lands.

On the other hand, our missionaries found ready listeners as they held outdoor street meetings in some of the principal thoroughfares in the city of San Pedro Sula and in villages. Tracts and Bible portions were gladly accepted by those who could read.

The Christian message was strongly reinforced by the Christian activities of teaching and healing which our missionaries began from the start. The schools which they established found immediate favor and exercised a helpful influence upon the lives of their students, their parents, and the community at large, and strongly reinforced the preaching of the gospel in those centers.

The healing ministry of our Honduras mission has lacked medical workers for long periods at a time. If the actual medical service rendered has therefore not been all that could be desired, the sympathy which our missionaries and the members of the growing church have had for those who were bodily afflicted, and the efforts which they made with the meager medical resources at hand, have endeared them to the many sufferers with whom they have come in touch.

After twenty years of Christian work in Honduras some notable achievements can be recorded. The most notable is the establishment of an Evangelical church with seven organized congregations in the north coast area. These congregations are small but virile. The spiritual seed planted has borne fruit. This is evidenced in a strong Christian consciousness in the members of

the church and in an increasing participation in making Christ known.

Most of the congregations are worshipping in suitable church homes or soon will be. On November 30, 1941, a beautiful church was dedicated in the city of San Pedro Sula. Another beautiful church is in process of erection in Yoro, one of our newer stations, and a third was dedicated in Puerto Cortez early in 1942. These churches were made possible by combined efforts and sacrificial gifts in Honduras and America.

In the educational field the present status is gratifying. The original primary school in San Pedro Sula was recently expanded and a normal department and pre-theological school added. The new theological seminary graduated its first class in 1940. Another primary school is in operation in Pinalejo. The housing of our schools is more adequate since the completion and dedication of a beautiful school auditorium in the city of San Pedro Sula on November 30, 1941, by Dr. L. W. Goebel, president of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, with Dr. Th. R. Schmale, President of the Board of International Missions, participating.

Progress has also been made in securing the missionary personnel required for an adequate staffing of our Honduras field. An ordained missionary and his wife were added to the staff in 1941 and a young ordained missionary in 1942. With these additions the number of ordained missionaries is five. The Board of International Missions believes that it will need six ordained missionaries for the Honduras field to staff its

work adequately. The need for a missionary trained nurse and another evangelistic woman missionary still exists.

It can be stated with deep satisfaction and thankfulness that the presence of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Honduras has apparently stimulated the Roman Church to greater spiritual activity. Prior to the coming of our church one priest was deemed sufficient for the needs not only of San Pedro Sula, but of the entire surrounding area, whereas a Bishop and four priests now labor in this area. Two new schools have been opened and the Roman Church is unquestionably endeavoring to meet the challenge not only of the presence of another church in its midst, but of the spiritual needs of the people of the area.

The progress of the past twenty years has been made possible because of God's rich blessing which has rested upon the efforts put forth by our church, but also by the devoted service of our missionary forces and their Honduran associates and by the sacrificial support which has been given the work by many members of the home constituency. Undoubtedly much greater progress could have been made if all members of the home constituency had loyally supported this work. That those who have thus far refrained from giving this support may loyally cooperate with the friends who have stood by in the past twenty years is the hope of the Board of International Missions and the expectation of our blessed Master, the Lord of the church.